

# **THE ROWERS' CODE**

## **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TEACHING SCHOLARS CASE STUDY**

### **Client**

The Teaching Scholars program at the University of Washington (UW) is a 1-year professional development program for educators in the health professions who desire to become academic leaders. The program was established in 1995. Each year, a group of health professionals from the UW Health sciences Professional Schools and foreign scholars studying at the university are selected for the program. The group meets throughout the year to address topics related to the interests and teaching responsibilities of the participants. Over the past 10 years, over 168 Teaching Scholars have participated in a Rowers' Code program tailored specifically for them. The next session will take place in September, 2014.

### **Issues**

Program founders sought a leadership experience that would galvanise the cohort of teaching scholars – one exciting enough to create a community of clinician educators and institutional leaders for innovation and change. Recognizing the need for health care providers to be able to work in teams to address the increasing complexity of care, and the value of building a team identity for each year's cohort, in 2003 the Teaching Scholars program partnered with the Rowers' Code Program.

### **Rowers' Code Solution**

A full-day workshop was created for the group and each year it takes place within the first few weeks of the Teaching Scholars year. The workshop introduces participants to skills that prepare them for taking leadership roles and to function as organizational change agents.

During the morning, the group learns the basics of Olympic style rowing, then take to the water in coxed 8 person rowing shells. Scholars are introduced to the Rowers' Code that reminds them, among other things, to demonstrate a sense of team by respecting the use of time, carrying their own load, and assigning every seat in the boat an equal value. The code guides their group activities, including exploring different team needs and identifying team members' unique talents and attributes. The exercise debrief helps translate the metaphor of rowing to participants' work life realities.

In the afternoon, scholars review their personalized Team Management Systems profiles, based on questionnaires completed prior to the session. These profiles provide insight into work style preferences and work-related interactions. Interactive exercises as well as debriefs spur lively discussions regarding differences in work styles and how to leverage this diversity and minimize conflict.

The Teaching Scholars program has developed an active group of supportive colleagues who are transforming educational practice, elevating the status of teaching, and increasing the recognition of teachers. Graduates of the program go on to fill key teaching and leadership roles at the university, and in national and international professional organizations.

### **Testimonials**

- I learned to appreciate the team, not just being the leader
- The overall organization was cohesive and concepts were reinforced with concrete examples
- I will be more open to different responses being due to differences in style rather than lack of understanding
- This certainly was one of, if not the most creative and enjoyable experiences of training I have ever attended, and am sure the concepts learned will become a large part of my decisions and future
- Inspirational